

INFLUENCE OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE COUNSELING ON ACADEMIC PROGRESSION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING OF ADOLESCENT STUDENT MOTHERS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Adolescent mothers struggle with self-acceptance because of their unfavorable motherhood status, which developed when they weren't ready for it. Their capacity to realize their own worth and acceptance may be impacted by this. This study thus, purposed to examine the influence of behavior change counseling on academic progression and psychological well-being of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya. The study adopted two theories, self-efficacy and theory of planned behaviour. The study was guided by correlation research design. The target population was 1,788 adolescent student mothers in Nakuru County, from which a sample of 221 respondents was selected through purposive sampling method. Teacher counsellors in the respective schools also formed part of the study sample. Validity of the instruments was guided by the objective while reliability was enhanced by test- retest method where a Cronbach co-efficient alpha of 0.82 was established. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Data analysis was aided by SPSS (Version 26). Pearson correlation was used to test the relationship between stigma counseling and academic progression and psychological wellbeing on the other hand. Findings from the study indicated that that Behavior change counselling influenced academic progression of adolescent student mothers positively ($r = .936$). R square was found to be 0.917. This indicates that 91.7% of the variance in academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools could be explained by behaviour change counselling of adolescent student mothers. The study recommends the need to enhance behavioral counselling interventions to help in psychological wellbeing of adolescent mothers. It further recommends the need for school counselors to help adolescent mothers foster behavior change to avoid repeat pregnancies.

Keywords: academic progression, adolescent, behaviour change, counseling, psychological wellbeing, student mothers

Introduction

Globally, over 16 million girls aged 15-19 years become pregnant every year with over 90% of the adolescent pregnancies occurring within marriage and among marginalized communities (UNESCO, 2017). The key causes of adolescent pregnancies are poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities (WHO, 2020). Adolescent mothers in the world are estimated at 65/1000 females where Sub-Saharan Africa remains the worst hit by adolescent pregnancy, with 143/1000 females (World Bank, 2017).

Research points out that adolescent mothers are associated with childbirth complication and risks such as anemia, high blood pressure, deliver of premature babies and babies with low birth weight (National Council for Population and Development, 2021; WHO, 2020). Kenya has an estimated adolescent pregnancy rate of 101/1000 females. According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (2014), 1 in 5 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are either pregnant or have given birth already. According to the most recent data from the Global Childhood, with 82 births per 1,000

live births, Kenya has the third-highest rate of teen pregnancies as of 2019. According to the UNFPA report, Kenya recorded 378,397 adolescent and teenage pregnancies for girls between the ages of 10 and 19 between July 2016 and June 2017. Specifically, 28,932 girls between the ages of 10 and 14 and 349,465 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 gave birth. Despite the fact that adolescent pregnancy impacts girls in a variety of circumstances, restricted access to education continues to be one of the main effects of the abating early motherhood. Key gaps remain in secondary school completion among adolescent girls worldwide with four out of five girls completing primary school, and only two out of five complete upper secondary school (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). Statistics from the United States indicates that 30% of adolescent girls who have dropped out of high school cite pregnancy or parenthood as a key reason, (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

A study conducted by Kruger, Berthelon and Navia (2015), in Chile, which examined among others factors contributing to drop out among secondary school going adolescents found that 37% of the cases of school dropout were due to pregnancies. Further, a study by Gyan (2013), which examined the effects of teenage pregnancy on the educational attainment of girls at Chorkor, a Suburb of Accra, Ghana found that as high as 86% of the adolescent students dropped out of school upon becoming pregnant. Similarly, a study by Vincent and Alemu (2016), which examined factors contributing to, and effects of, teenage pregnancy in Juba, South Sudan found that 54% of cases of school dropout were caused by pregnancy.

A sharp surge in reported teenage pregnancies is threatening to cut short the pursuit of education for vulnerable girls, with the latest statistics from a Kenya Health Information System survey revealing that a total of 3,964 girls aged 19 years and below were reported pregnant in Machakos County in Kenya over a period of four months (KNA, 2020). Adolescent pregnancy has been cited as a major development challenge that denies the youthful population of Kenya their growth aspirations of being productive citizens (UNFPA, 2019). A survey by Demographic and Health Surveys (2019), indicated that 378,397 teenage pregnancies were recorded between July 2016 and June 2017 and over 28,000 of these pregnancies occurring among girls aged 10-14 years. The report further shows that 1 out of 5 girls between the age of 15 and 19 in Kenya are pregnant with their first child or have already given birth (National Council for Population and Development, 2021; UNFPA, 2019). Cases of school drop outs due to pregnancy were highest and least in the former Nyanza and Central Provinces, with 22% and 10% rates respectively. Other regions with significantly higher cases of school drop outs due to pregnancy were Coast (21%) and Rift Valley (21%). Nairobi, Western, Eastern and North Eastern provinces had 17%, 17%, 14% and 12% respectively cases of school drop outs on account of pregnancy. The overall average masks disparities and magnitude of the problem at the County level. One in ten girls has begun child bearing in Elgeyo Marakwet, Murang'a, Nyeri and Nyandarua counties while four out of ten girls have began child bearing in Narok and Homa Bay Counties (Ministry of Health, 2020). Additionally, a baseline study report on expanding access to secondary school education for teenage mothers conducted in Homa Bay County, Kenya by Undie, Birungi, Odwe and Obare (2015) found that 66% of cases of school dropout were due to pregnancy.

The low re-entry of adolescent mothers into school as shown above has prompted governments around the world to develop re-entry policies, whose overall goal is to encourage the resumption of studies by adolescent mothers. Pregnant females must be pulled out of school and re-admitted

to a new school no earlier than 12 months after the pregnancy has ended, according to Botswana's re-entry policy for adolescent mothers (Molosiwa & Bernard, 2012). According to Malawi's re-entry policy for adolescent mothers, girls must be readmitted at the start of the following academic year after being suspended for a year immediately upon the discovery of their pregnancy (Ministry of Education, [Malawi], 1993). In accordance with the policy, counseling services must be offered to the affected girl both at the time of removal from school and the time of re-admittance. Zambia's school re-entry policy mandates a leave of absence of between six and a maximum of twelve months following delivery before returning to school (Ministry of Education [Zambia], 2010). The policy mandates that pregnant women be given advice on exit and entry points. There isn't yet a formal policy in Tanzania or Uganda regarding the return of teenage mothers (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [Tanzania], 2013; Ministry of Education and Sports [Uganda], 2015). However, it has long been customary in the two nations to expel pregnant students from classes without the possibility of re-admittance. Policies in Kenya's education system explicitly handle pregnant students and teenage mothers with girls being allowed to return to school after delivering. The re-entry policy however does not specify a specific amount of time that they should take off.

Omwancha (2012) claims that counseling adolescent mothers upon their return to formal education is essential in assisting them in coping with the stigma and labeling associated with having mothers in a learning setting. Similarly, Ekpo (2007) came to the conclusion that counseling services provided in schools aid in reducing the irregular behavior patterns brought on by social, psychological, emotional, and developmental issues. Although Lewis and Lockheed (2007), Maluli and Bali (2014), Ekpo (2007) and Omwancha (2012) have hailed the significance of counselling of adolescent mothers in their academic progression, and indeed stressed the need for such counselling services, the authors have not demonstrated the role of such counselling in the academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers. The scholars have also not indicated the type of counselling services that should be offered to adolescent mothers resuming studies. The study therefore examined the influence of individual counselling on academic progression and psychological well-being of adolescent mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to examine the influence of stigma counselling on academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

Objective of the Study

To examine the influence of behavior change counseling on academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

There is no statistically significant influence of behaviour change counselling on the academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Literature Review

Behaviour change counseling, wellbeing and academic progression of student mothers

According to Markway and Markway (2011), majority of adolescent mothers struggle with self-acceptance because of their unfavorable motherhood status, which developed when they weren't ready for it. Their capacity to realize their own worth and acceptance may be impacted by this. Adolescent mothers are more likely to be subjected to various sorts of exploitation, early sexual encounters and further pregnancies because they are unable to appreciate and accept their circumstances. Teenage mothers who experience these kinds of psychological issues could benefit from treatment on behavior modification. Counseling for behavior modification aims to develop self-awareness, make corrections and changes, and account for flaws. Behavior change counseling is a therapeutic approach aimed at helping individuals modify and improve their behaviors, habits, and lifestyles in order to achieve specific health-related goals or address behavioral issues (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). It involves a collaborative and client-centered process in which a counselor or therapist works with the individual to identify problematic behaviors, set achievable goals, and develop strategies to bring about positive changes (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Behavior change counseling is often used in various healthcare and mental health settings to address issues such as substance abuse, weight management, smoking cessation, stress reduction, and more. In this study Behaviour change counselling was contextualised to mean a therapeutic approach aimed at helping an adolescent mother modify and improve their behaviors, habits, and lifestyles in order to achieve specific education and health-related goals and past behaviours and choices.

Behavior change counseling is crucial for adolescent mothers because it addresses their unique needs and challenges during a critical period of their lives. It can empower them to make positive changes, provide optimal care for their children, and work towards a brighter future for both themselves and their families (Rollnick, Miller & Butler, 2008). Adolescent mothers are facing a significant life transition that includes new roles and responsibilities. Behavior change counseling can help them adapt to these changes more effectively by addressing issues related to parenting, education, and future planning. Resnicow and McMaster (2012), observe that adolescents' mothers may lack experience in parenting, high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression and behavior change counseling can provide them with essential parenting skills, including feeding, bathing, and emotional support for their infants. Adolescent mothers often experience stigmatization and social isolation and those who are sexually active, behavior counseling can include discussions about contraception and family planning to reduce the likelihood of repeat pregnancies during adolescence (Resnicow and McMaster).

Ekpo (2007), concluded that school guidance and counseling services help reduce irregular behaviour patterns emanating from social, psychological, emotional and developmental problems. In Zimbabwe teachers indicated that school guidance and counseling services improve social interpersonal and problem solving skills (Mudhumani, 2005). Gysber and Henderson (2012), further reinforces the above point when he stated that effective school guidance and counseling services result in the decrease of cases of poor discipline among learners and reduce school drop-out rate. Empirical and theoretical writings have underscored the significance of school counseling in prevention of anti-social behaviours and mental breakdown. Psychological well-being implies that the individual is exhibiting normal behaviour and undertaking his/her responsibilities well. The fact that school counseling has proved useful in preventing students from abusing alcohol and

drugs, becoming indisciplined, entertaining suicidal thoughts and other forms of irregular and queer behaviours makes counseling an important service to adolescent students.

Programs for school counseling have a big impact on discipline issues. According to Baker and Gerler (2008), students who took part in a school counseling program displayed considerably fewer improper behaviors and more favorable attitudes toward school than students who did not. The authors also claimed that participants' hostile and aggressive behaviors considerably decreased as a result of receiving group counseling from school counselors.

UNFPA (2019), demonstrates that adolescent pregnancy and resulting adolescent motherhood as a leading factor for school dropout among adolescent girls. While pregnancy adversely affects adolescent students in diverse ways, it also stands out as one of the biggest hindrances to the young girls' education. Adolescent motherhood derails the academic achievement of the affected girls and continues to place obstacles in adolescent student mothers' participation in education. Although some adolescent students resume studies after delivery their performance remains low and a significant number of those who resume studies fail to complete their studies. Governments' policies of resumption of studies by adolescent student mothers require that such girls are counseled before their readmission. It is hoped that pre admission counseling of adolescent student mothers can help in enabling students cope with their dual role of motherhood and learning. There is need to review literature that supports the role of guidance and counseling in the promotion of well-being of learners and academic progress generally and adolescent mothers in particular.

Kroelinger, Oths and Pichler (1997), in a study on social support in pregnant and parenting adolescents highlighted the important role of social support and the need to integrate it into behavior change counseling programs in the lives of pregnant and parenting adolescents. In a study by Koniak-Griffin and Verzemnieks (1990), that examined the Teen Outreach Programme (TOP), which includes behavior change counseling as part of its comprehensive approach to supporting pregnant and parenting adolescents; the findings brought to fore the essence of such programmes in reducing repeat pregnancies and improving educational outcomes among adolescent mothers. Kim, Conolly & Tamim (2014), in a study on the antecedents and consequences of problematic social support indicated the crucial role played by social support, in promoting many behavior change counseling programmes, and its impact on stress and well-being among adolescent mothers. It is therefore important to consider that adolescent mothers face unique challenges as they juggle the responsibilities of both motherhood and education. The influence of these challenges on their academic progression and well-being can be significant and also formed the premise for this study.

Methodology

The study was guided by correlation research design. The target population was 1,788 adolescent student mothers in Nakuru County, from which a sample of 221 respondents arrived at through purposive sampling method. Teacher counsellors in the respective schools also formed part of the study sample. Validity of the instruments was guided by the objective while reliability was enhanced by test-retest method where a Cronbach co-efficient alpha of 0.82 was established. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Data analysis was aided by SPSS (Version 26). Pearson correlation was used to test the relationship between behavior change counseling and academic progression and psychological wellbeing on the other hand.

Findings

This objective sought to examine the influence of behaviour change counseling on psychological wellbeing and academic progression of adolescent student mothers in Nakuru County, Kenya. This also sought to establish whether behaviour change counseling had made adolescent student mothers better placed to appreciate the complexity of motherhood roles, effectively balanced maternal care and academics roles and active participants in resolution of personal problems.

Resilience counseling for student mothers

Overcoming anti-social behaviours such as alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual indulgence, which might not only lead to repeat adolescent pregnancy but also undermine academic pursuit, requires resilience counseling. Resilience counseling is meant to make adolescent student mothers aware of the challenges they are likely to face in their dual roles as mothers and students. It is also meant to equip them with skills to overcome pressures from their peers and other people that may distract them from their core responsibilities as students. This study sought to establish whether adolescent student mothers received resilient counseling upon resumption of studies. The results of the study the extent to which adolescent student mothers received resilient counseling are presented in Figure 1.

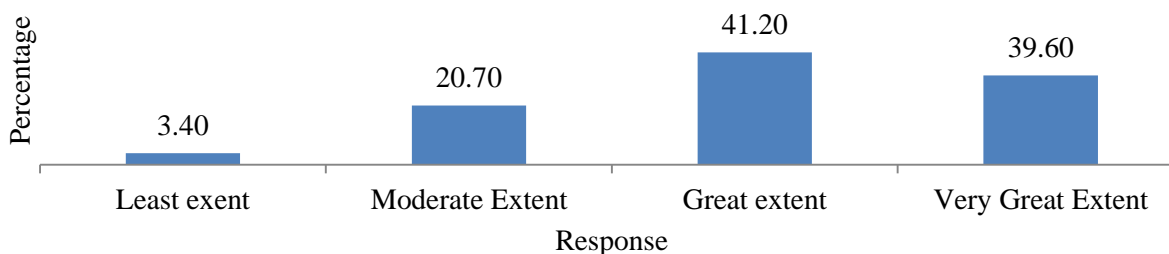


Figure 1: Persistence Counselling

Persistence counselling was offered to majority of the adolescent student mothers according to the results of the study in Figure 1. The results indicate that 39.6%, 41.2% and 20.7% of the respondents reported that to a very great extent, great extent and moderate extent they were counselled on persistence. Further, 3.4% of the respondents indicated that they received persistence counselling though to a lesser extent.

Behaviour change counselling was measured by the extent to which the responded agreed with the following statements: the student had been counselled to believe that she could handle dual role of motherhood and academics with ease, had always taken lead in the search for solutions to personal problems, considered motherhood as a motivation rather than a hindrance in the pursuit of life goals, had helped her in the choice of associates, knew that the solution to any problem that started with her, have been counselled on the importance of hard work and persistence in everything she did, and was no longer yielding to peer pressure.

The results of the analysis on the influence of behaviour change counseling on the academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1:
Behaviour Change and the Academic Progression and Psychological Well Being

Statement	Total	Mean
Believe that I can handle my dual role of motherhood and academics with ease	722	3.70256
Have always taken lead in the search for solutions to personal problems	677	3.47179
Consider motherhood as a motivation rather than a hindrance in the pursuit of my life goals	648	3.32308
Counselling has helped me in the choice of associates	630	3.23077
Know that the solution to any problem that I have starts with me	615	3.15385
Have been counselled on the importance of hard work and persistence in everything that I do	521	2.67179
No longer yield to peer pressure	520	2.66667

Table 2 presents Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient between behaviour change counselling and the academic progression and psychological wellbeing of Adolescent Student Mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Table 2:
Behaviour Change Counselling and the Academic Progression and Psychological Well Being

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error Change Statistics				Sig. Change	F
				Estimate	Change	F Change	df1		
1	.958 ^a	.917	.916	.59220	.917	2129.731	1	193	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Behaviour Change

Table 3 presents Simple Regression Analysis of Behaviour Change Counselling and the Academic Progression and Psychological Well Being of Adolescent Student Mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya

Table 3:
Behaviour Change Counselling and the Academic Progression and Psychological Well Being

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	746.909	1	746.909	2129.731	.000 ^b
	Residual	67.686	193	.351		
	Total	814.595	194			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Progression and Psychological Wellbeing Total

b. Predictors: (Constant), Behaviour Change

Table 2 indicates that the Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient between behaviour change counselling and the academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public

secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya, was statistically significant at .05 level of significance ($r = .958$, $p = 0.000$). The r square was found to be 0.917. This indicates that 91.7% of the variance in academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya could be explained by the behaviour change counselling

From Table 3, the F value was found to be significant ($F(1, 193) = 2129.731$, $p = .000$). Therefore, null that behaviour change counselling has no statistically significant influence of on the academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya was rejected at .05 significance level. It was therefore concluded that behaviour change counselling has influence on the academic progression and psychological wellbeing of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

According to the results in Table 3 the mean score that was highest was that believe that the adolescent student mother could handle dual role of motherhood and academics with ease (mean = 3.70256), followed by the fact that she has always taken lead in the search for solutions to personal problems (mean = 3.47179) and the third on the mean was that the respondent considered motherhood as a motivation rather than a hindrance in the pursuit of life goals (mean = 3.32308). On the other hand, the student's adolescent student mother knowing that the solution to any problem she had started with her was the third least (mean = 3.15385), had been counselled on the importance of hard work and persistence in everything that she did followed (mean = 2.67179) and the least was the she no longer yielded to peer pressure (mean = 2.66667)

The results of the inferential analysis agree with Ekpo (2007) that concluded that school guidance and counseling services help reduce irregular behaviour patterns emanating from social, psychological, emotional and developmental problems. In Zimbabwe teachers indicated that school guidance and counseling services improve social interpersonal and problem solving skills (Mudhumani, 2005). Gysber and Henderson (2012), further reinforces the above point when he stated that effective school guidance and counseling services result in the decrease of cases of poor discipline among learners and reduce school drop-out rate. Empirical and theoretical writings have underscored the significance of school counseling in prevention of anti-social behaviours and mental breakdown. Psychological well-being implies that the individual is exhibiting normal behaviour and undertaking his/her responsibilities well. The fact that school counseling has proved useful in preventing students from abusing alcohol and drugs, becoming indisciplined, entertaining suicidal thoughts and other forms of irregular and queer behaviours makes counseling an important service to adolescent students.

Programs for school counseling have a big impact on discipline issues. According to Baker and Gerler (2011), students who took part in a school counseling program displayed considerably fewer improper behaviors and more favorable attitudes toward school than students who did not. The authors also claimed that participants' hostile and aggressive behaviors considerably decreased as a result of receiving group counseling from school counselors. It is envisaged that pre-admission counseling for mothers of adolescent students will help students manage their simultaneous responsibilities of parenting and education. Reviewing the literature on the benefits of guidance and counseling for promoting student well-being and academic development in general, and adolescent mothers in particular, is necessary.

Conclusions

The study concluded that significant relationship exist between behaviour change counseling on one hand and academic progression and psychological well-being on the other of adolescent student mothers in public secondary schools in Nakuru County. Further examination of the study results shows that all the behaviour counseling approaches adopted namely persistence counseling, resistance counseling and multi-tasking had played immense role in the academic progression of adolescent student mothers in secondary schools in Nakuru County. With regard to psychological well-being of adolescent student mothers, it was established that persistence counseling and resistance counseling approaches yielded the greatest benefit.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that counselling for adolescent mothers should be allocated more time and programmed in the school routine. The study further recommends that there is need to enhance self-awareness counselling in schools in order to improve psychological well-being and academic progression of adolescent mothers.

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